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### **CORAL WORLD OCEAN PARK REACHES ACROSS THE ATLANTIC FOR LIVESTREAM SESSION WITH AUTISTIC CHILDREN.**

On April 28, 2020, Coral World staff provided a 30-minute guided tour of the park to children with Autism Spectrum disorders and their families in Sheffield, England. Through videoconferencing, the children and their families were able to see and learn about turtles, sharks, and dolphins and discover ways in which they could help protect them in the wild.

The project was born when Ms Liesje Dusauzay, founder of the Sparkle Sheffield Charity, contacted Coral World in hopes of offering an experience to families that were in social isolation in England. Sparkle supports children and young people from birth to 25 with Autism Spectrum disorders and other social communication difficulties. Dusauzay stated, "Although we are on lockdown, I wanted the children to know they can still explore the world and learn from it."

Coral World had already embraced sharing the park worldwide through its daily Facebook Live presentations. Kristine Tartaglio, Assistant Curator for Marine Mammals and Birds, observed, "One of my favorite parts of my job at Coral World has been to use my experience in child behavior to help families with children who have special needs, like autism, connect with our sea lions. I was excited by the opportunity to create a fun and educational experience for the Sparkle children and their families." Tartaglio's education and prior work experience in the field of Applied Behavior Analysis therapy for children with autism provided the expertise for structuring the special tour. Tartaglio went on to say, "After a couple of practice runs, our staff video-conferenced the entire tour and the families were able to see the presentation in real time."

According to Dusauzay, "The experience was absolutely AMAZING! So far, the best show we have had. To be able to see all the animals up close and personal and to have someone tell you facts about the animals that our children didn't know. It was just a lovely way to learn. They discovered animals that they don't get to see in the UK in their own environment. It made them believe now that they can do anything." Some of the children have drawn pictures thanking Coral World staff for the experience. Dusauzay said, "The children and their families absolutely LOVED it and they have asked if they can see it again. They have told others too and now we have a waiting list of people that would like to enjoy the experience."

The tour was just as rewarding for the Coral World staff who were able to see the wonder and excitement of their audience. General Manager Trudie Prior said, "The restrictions imposed by COVID-19 have forced Coral World to embrace new ways to reach people and inspire the next generation of environmental conservationists. I thank our dedicated staff for the innovations they have introduced."

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#### About Coral World Ocean Park

Coral World Ocean Park is a marine park in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands and is accredited by the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA). Dedicated to providing the highest quality of care for marine mammals and contributing to conservation efforts through scientific research, Coral World offers programming to educate visitors about conservation and how they can make a positive impact on maintaining the integrity of the marine ecosystem. Through interactive experiences that allows visitors to get up close and personal with marine life surrounding the Virgin Islands, Coral World strives to inspire the next generation of animal advocates and conservationists. For more information, visit the Coral World website at <https://coralworldvi.com/>.